MAGNA CARTA
Oxford to the Manitoba Legislative Building

On the occasion of the visit by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 3, 2010

The Great Charter agreed on 15 June 1215 between King John and his barons at Runnymede near Windsor remains to this day one of the world's great symbols of freedom and the rule of law. Its declaration that no free man should be imprisoned without due process underlies the development of common law in England and the concepts of individual liberty and constitutional government which created the United States of America.

The document here displayed is an original Magna Carta – not a copy, but an official engrossment or exemplification of the Latin text, sent out by the royal chancery to Oxfordshire in 1217. No master-prototype has survived from King John's ceremony at Runnymede. Instead, engrossments were distributed to county courts across England by the chancery, both in 1215 and as official reissues another five times before 1300, in the succeeding reigns of John's son Henry III and grandson Edward I. Seventeen such originals still survive from the 13th century, as sent out during the three reigns: four from the first issue of 1215, one of 1216, four of 1217, four of 1225, none of 1265 and four of 1297.

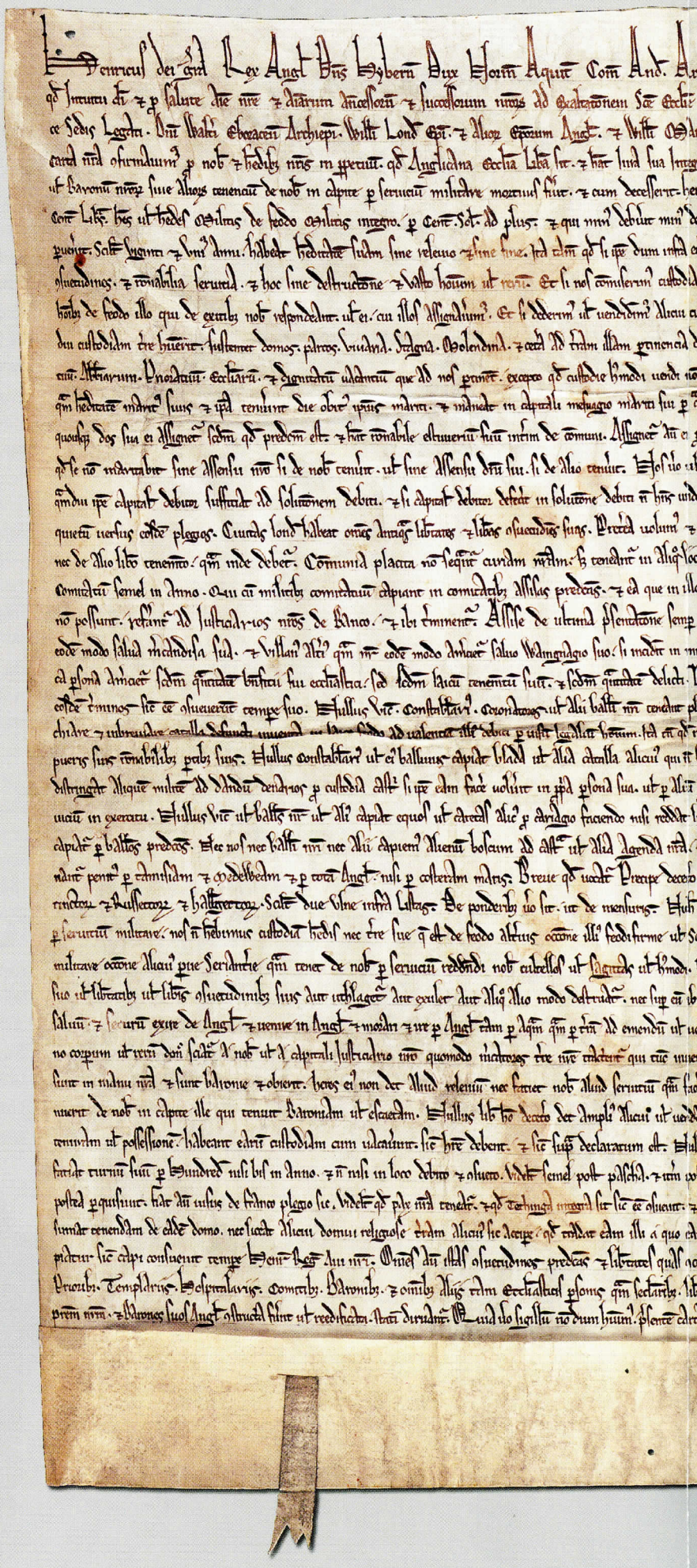
The one example now kept permanently in the United States is from 1297, evidently dispatched to the county of Buckinghamshire. It had formerly belonged to the Brudenell family of Deene Park, Northamptonshire. It was bought in 1983 by Ross Perot and loaned for display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. In December 2007 it was sold at auction by the Perot foundation at Sotheby's, New York, to David M. Rubinstein, who has generously returned it to the National Archives for further long-term loan and display. Another example of 1297 is displayed in the Parliament House of Australia at Canberra. The other fifteen all belong to eight institutions in England. Single charters are now held at the cathedrals of Lincoln, Salisbury and Hereford, and at the London Metropolitan Archives; two each at Durham (Cathedral Muniments) and the National Archives in London; three more at the British Library in London; and four at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

The Bodleian charter here displayed is one of the Library's three originals of the solemn reissue of November 1217. Its heading names the boy king Henry III, then just ten years old, who had succeeded his father in 1216. Power was held by his guardians, William Marshal the elder and the papal legate, so this document carried their seals, not Henry's. Marshal's is now lost, but Cardinal Guala's oval seal still survives, with his portrait in ecclesiastical robes.

The destination of this parchment original may be inferred as the shire court of Oxfordshire, since it was evidently stored throughout the Middle Ages at Oseney Abbey, just outside Oxford. After the Abbey's dissolution in 1539, its archives passed to Christ Church Cathedral, where in 1667 the antiquary Anthony Wood was given his pick of those charters which did not relate directly to lands held by Christ Church. Wood bequeathed his manuscripts (1695) to the Ashmolean Museum, which transferred them to the Bodleian Library in 1860. Thus the charter has been in Oxfordshire since 1217 and has belonged to Oxford University for over three centuries. This overseas trip in 2010 is the first time it has left home in nearly 800 years.

Seal of Cardinal Guala, 1217
MS. Ch. Oxon. Oseney 142c*

Seal of William Marshal the elder, 1217
MS. Ch. Oxon. Oseney 142b*



Magna Carta, reissued November 1217 in the name of King Henry III: official engrossment sent to Oxfordshire

Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

MS. Ch. Oxon. Oseney 142c

... Archiepis. Epis. Abbatib. Priorib. Comitib. Baronib. Vicecomitib. Prepositis. Ministris. & Omnib. Ballivis & fidelib. suis presentem Cartam inspecturis. Salt. Sciatis
... tis & emendatione Regni nri concessim & hac presenti carta confirmavim p nob & heredib nris in ppetuum de consilio Venabilis Patris nri Dni Gual. tt. Sci Martini Pbri Card. & Apli
... Marescalli Com Penbroc Rectoris nri & Regni nri & aliorum fideliu Com & Baron nror Angl has libertates subscriptas tenendas in regno nro Angl in ppetuum. In primis concessim Deo & hac presenti
... integra & libertates suas illesas. Concessim etiam omnib Libis hoib regni nri p nob & hedib nris in ppetuum os libtates subscriptas hndas & tenendas eis & hedib suis de nob & hedib nris. Siquis Comitu
... heres ei plene etatis fuit & releviu debeat. hat hereditate suam p antiquum relevium. Scilt heres ul heredes Com de Baronia Comitis integr. p Cent Lib. heres ul heredes Baronis de Baronia integra p
... di ter. scdm antiqm consuetudinem feodor. Si aut heres alicuius talium fuit infra etate. Dns ei no habeat custodiam ei nec tre sue antiqm homagiu ei ceper. & postqm talis heres fuit in custodia cu ad etate
... ad etate fuit sicut miles. nichominus tra remaneat in custodia dnorum suor usq ad tminu predcm. Custos tre hmodi hedis qui infra etate fuit. n capiat de tra hedis nisi ronabiles exit. & ronabiles
... stodiam alicui talis tre vic ul alicui alii qui de exitib tre illi nob debeat respondre. & ille destructione de custodia fecit ul vastu. nos ab illo capiem emendam. & tra comittat duob legalib & discretis
... n custodiam alicui talis tre. & ille destructione inde fecit ul vastu. amittat ipam custodiam & tradat duob legalib & discretis hoib de feodo illo. qui simil nob respondeant. sic predcm est. Custos aute
... ia de exitib tre eiusde. & reddat hedi cu ad plenam etate puenit. tram sua tota instauratam de carrucis & omnib aliis reb ad min scdm qd illam recepit. Hec omia observent de custodiis Archiepatuu Epat
... no debent. Heredes maritent absq disparagatione. Vidua post morte mariti sui statim & sine difficultate aliq hat maritagiu suu & hereditate sua. nec aliqd det p dote sua & p maritagio suo ul hereditate sua
... p qdraginta dies post obitu ipius mariti sui infra quos ei assignet dos sua. nisi prius ei fuit assignata. ul nisi dom illa sit castru. & si de castro recesserit. statim puideat ei domus competens in qua possit honeste morari
... e p dote sua tcia pars tocius tre mariti sui que sua fuit in vita sua. nisi de minori dotata fuit ad ostiu ecclie. Nulla vidua distringat ad se maritandu du voluit vivre sin marito. ita tm qd securitate faciat
... ul balliui nri non saisiem tram aliqm uel reditu p debito aliq. qmdiu catalla debitoris psencia sufficiunt ad debitu reddendu. & ipe debitor paratus sit inde satisface. nec plegii ipius debitoris distringantur
... unde reddat. aut redde nolit cu possit. plegii respondeant de debito. & si voluint habeant tras & reddit debitoris quousq sit eis satisfcm de debito qd ant p eo solverint. nisi capitalis debitor monstraverit se inde esse
... & ccedim qd omes alie civitates & burgi & ville & barones de qnq portub & omes portus habeant omes libtates & libas consuetudies suas. Nullus distringat ad faciend maius servitiu de feodo militis
... loco certo. Recognitones de nova dissaisina. de morte antecessoris no capiant nisi in suis comitatib. & hoc modo. Nos. ul si ext regnu fuim. capitalis Justiciari nr mittem Justiciarios p unuquq
... illo adventu suo i comitatu p justiciarios predcos ad dictas assisas capiendas nullos tminari n possint. p eosdem tminet alibi in itinere suo. & ea q p eosde pp difficultate aliquor articulor tminari
... mp capiant coram Justiciar de Banco & ibi tminent. Lib homo n amciet p puo delicto nisi scdm modu ipius delicti. & p magno delicto scdm magnitudinem delicti salvo contenemto suo. & mercator
... misericordiam nram. & nulla predcarum misericordiarum ponat nisi p sacramentum pborum & legaliu hoium de visneto. Comites & Barones no amcient nisi p pares suos & n nisi scdm modu delicti. Nulla ecclia
... ti. Nec villa nec homo distringat facere pontes ad riparias. nisi qui ab antiq & de iure facere debet. Nulla riparia decetero defendat nisi ille q fuunt in defenso tempe Henr Reg avi nri p eade loca &
... placita corone nre. Si aliquis tenes de nob laicu feodu moriat. & vic ul ballius nr ostendat litas nras patentes de sumonitione nra de debito qd defunct nob debuit. liceat vic ul ballio nro attach
... qd nichil inde amoveat. donec psolvat nob debitu qd clarum fuit. & residuu relinquat executorib ad faciend testamentu defuncti. & si nichil nob debeat ab ipo. omia catalla cedant defuncto salvis uxori ipius &
... n sit de villa ubi castru situ est. nisi statim inde reddat denarios aut respectu inde hre possit de voluntate venditoris. Si aut de villa ipa fuit. infra qdraginta dies preciu reddat. Null constabularius
... lit p pbum hoiem si ipe eam facere non possit p ronabilem cam. Et si nos duxim eu ul miserim i exercitu. erit qetus de custodia scdm qntitate tempis quo p nos fuit in exercitu. de feodo p quo fecit ser
... de libatione antiquitus statuta. Scilt p carecta ad duos equos decem denarios. p die. & p careta ad tres equos qatuordecim denar p die. Nulla careta dnica alic ecclastice psone ul militis ul alicui dne
... ta. nisi p voluntate illius. cui boscus ille fuit. Nos non tenebim tras eor qui convicti fuint de felonia. nisi p unu annu & unu die. & tunc reddant tre dnis feodor. Omes kidelli decetero depo
... cetero no fiat alicui de aliquo tenemto un lib ho pdat curiam sua. Una mensura vini sit p totu regnu nrm. & una msura cervisie & una msura bladi. Scilt qrteriu Lond. & una latitudo pannor
... tuti detur decetero p brevi inquisitionis ab eo qui inquisitionem petit de vita ul membris. s3 gratis concedat & n negetur. Si aliqs teneat de nob p feodifirma ul socagiu ul p burgagiu & de alio teneat tram
... t socagiu ul burgagiu nec hebim custodia illi feodifirme ul socagiu ul burgagii nisi ipa feodifirma debeat servitiu militare. Nos n hebim custodia hedis ul tre alicui qm tenet de alio p servitiu
... do. Null ballius ponat decetero aliquem ad legem manifesta nec ad iuramentum simplici loqla sua sine testib fidelib ad hoc inductis. Nullus lib ho capiat ul inprisonet aut dissaisiet de libo tenemto
... ibim. nec sup eu mittem nisi p legale iudiciu pariu suor ul p lege tre. Nulli vendem nulli negabim aut differem rectum ul justiciam. Omes mercatores nisi publice antea phibiti fuint. habeant
... t vendendu sine omib malis toltis p antiqs & rectas consuetudies. pter qm in tempe guerre. & si sint de tra contra nos guerrina. Et si tales inveniant in tra nra in pncipio guerre. attachient sine dap
... inveniant in tra ctra nos guerrina. & si nri salvi sint ibi. alii salvi sint in tra nra. Siquis tenuit de aliq escaeta sic de honore Wallingeford. Notingeham. Bolon. Lancastr. ul de aliis escaetis que
... facet baroniam e in tra illa i manu baronis. & nos eodem modo eam tenebim quo baro eam tenuit. nec nos occone talis baronie ul escaete hebim aliqm escaeta ul custodiam aliquor hoium nror nisi alibi te
... endat de tra sua. qm ut de residuo tre sue possit sufficient fieri dno feodi servitiu ei debitum. qd ptinet ad feodu illd. Omes patroni abbatiaru qui hnt cartas Regu Angl de advocatione ul antiqm
... Nullus capiat ul inprisonet pp appellum femine de morte alterius qm viri sui. Nullus Comitatus decetero teneat nisi de mense in mensem. & ubi maior tminus ee solebat. maior sit. nec aliqs vic ul ballius suus
... post festu Sci Michael. Et visus de franco plegio tunc fiat ad illu tminu Sci Michael sin occone. ita scilt qd quilib hat libtates suas quas hunt & hre consuevit tempe Henr Reg avi nri. ul quas
... & qd vic no querat occones. & qd contentus sit de eo qd vic hre consuevit de visu suo faciendo. tempe Henr Reg avi nri. Non liceat alicui decetero dare tram suam alicui domui religiose. ita qd illam re
... eam recipe tenendam. Siquis aut decetero tram sua alicui domui religiose sic dedit. & sup hoc convincat. donu suu penit cassetur. & tra illa dno suo illius feodi incurrat. Scutagiu decetero ca
... concessimus in Regno nro tenendas qntum ad nos ptinet erga nros. omes de Regno nro tam clici qm laici observent qntu ad se ptinet erga suos. Salvis Archiepis. Epis. Abbatib.
... libtatib & libis consuetudinib quas prius habuerunt. Statuimus etiam de comuni consilio totius Regni nri qd omia castra adulterina. scilt ea q a pncipio guerre mote int Dnm Johem Rege
... cartam sigill venabilis pris nri Dni Gual tt. Sci Martini Pbri card. & Aplice Sed Legati & Willi Marescal Com Penbr Rectoris nri & Regni nri. fecimus sigillari. Testib prenominatis. & aliis Multis.

142c

MAGNA CARTA

The four official engrossments held by The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

Magna Carta (issue of 1217)

Sent by the royal chancery to Oxfordshire. Well preserved, apart from the loss of one of its two seals, that of William Marshal; the surviving oval seal in dark green wax shows the papal legate Cardinal Guala in his ecclesiastical robes. The landscape format of the parchment is rarer but not unique amongst the other surviving originals. The Oxfordshire destination is inferred from its medieval storage in the archives of the Augustinian Abbey of Oseney (Osney), near Oxford. The archives passed soon after 1539 to the Chapter House of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, from where those charters not related to Christ Church lands were given in 1667 to Anthony Wood (1632–1695). Bequeathed by Wood to the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, and transferred from there to the Bodleian Library in 1860.

Approx. 11.6 in. x 16 in. (296 x 410 mm.). 43 lines.
MS. Ch. Oxon. Oseney 142c

Magna Carta (issue of 1217)

Another original evidently also sent by the royal chancery to Oxfordshire and stored later at Oseney Abbey. The text is written in the larger and more usual upright format. The round equestrian seal in green wax of William Marshal the elder survives, that of Cardinal Guala is lost. Three large but regularly spaced holes in the parchment suggest that it was nibbled by rodents whilst still folded. Bequest of Anthony Wood (1695), as above.

Approx. 19.3 x 14.9 in. (490 x 378 mm.). 66 lines.
MS. Ch. Oxon. Oseney 142b

Magna Carta (issue of 1217)

Sent by the royal chancery to Gloucestershire. William Marshal's equestrian seal in green wax on the right is well preserved, that of Cardinal Guala in white wax on the left entirely defaced. Otherwise in fine condition. Later medieval endorsements on the back are characteristic of St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester (now Gloucester Cathedral), where it must have been stored. Received by the Bodleian Library in 1755 in the bequest of Richard Furney (1694–1753), archdeacon of Surrey, a native of Gloucester and former schoolmaster at Gloucester Cathedral (1719–24).

Approx. 19.3 x 16.6 in. (490 x 422 mm.). 56 lines.
MS. Ch. Glouc. 8

Magna Carta (issue of 1225)

The parchment is damaged at the foot, where the missing Great Seal of Henry III would once have been attached. The King had assumed nominal control of his own seal in 1223, on nearing his majority. Although catalogued separately at the Bodleian by 1878 as a 'London' charter (on the basis of its issue by the royal chancery at Westminster), the document carries an earlier numbering on the back which places it in sequence with the two Oseney charters of 1217. Accordingly, it most likely followed the same path as those, via Oseney Abbey, Christ Church, Anthony Wood and the Ashmolean Museum to the Bodleian Library in 1860.

Approx. 18.6 x 11.7 in. (472 x 298 mm.). 72 lines.
MS. Ch. London 1

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